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C O N F I D E N T I A L VATICAN 000737

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/WE LEVIN; NEA/RA; NEA/NGA BILLINGSLEY

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TAGS: [IZ](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [VT](#)

SUBJECT: IRAQ: VATICAN SEES NO NEED TO RUSH ELECTIONS

CLASSIFIED BY: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES, D. BRENT HARDT. REASONS:  
1.5 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (C) HOLY SEE COUNTRY DIRECTOR FOR IRAQ FRANCO COPPOLA TOLD US FEBRUARY 23 THAT THE VATICAN WAS FULLY SUPPORTIVE OF THE RECENTLY-ANNOUNCED DECISION THAT IRAQI ELECTIONS WOULD NOT BE HELD BY JUNE 30. HE SAID THE U.S. AND THE COALITION PROVISIONAL AUTHORITY (CPA) SHOULD "TAKE ALL THE TIME THEY NEED" TO PREPARE THE COUNTRY FOR DEMOCRATIC RULE. THE HOLY SEE UNDERSTANDS THAT THIS IS NO SIMPLE PROCESS -- SADDAM WAS NOT A MERE "PARENTHESIS OF DICTATORSHIP" IN AN OTHERWISE RICH IRAQI HISTORY OF DEMOCRACY. WITH NO SUCH TRADITION IN THE NATION, COPPOLA SAID IT REMAINED A PRIORITY TO STABILIZE THE COUNTRY, ENGAGE THE POPULATION, AND ACHIEVE A GENERAL CONSENSUS SUPPORTIVE OF THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS BEFORE HOLDING ELECTIONS. IN A PERFECT WORLD, HE ADDED, IRAQ WOULD BE READY FOR ELECTIONS RIGHT AWAY -- BUT THAT IS NOT REALISTIC. HE BELIEVED THE RISK OF GOING TOO QUICKLY WAS FAR GREATER THAN THAT OF GOING TOO SLOWLY.

[1](#)2. (C) THOUGH COPPOLA REMAINED SUPPORTIVE OF U.S. POLICY IN POST-WAR IRAQ, HE EXPRESSED SOME CONCERN ABOUT THE SPECIFICS OF THE PLANNED TRANSFER OF SOVEREIGNTY TO THE IRAQI PEOPLE ON JUNE 30. WHAT WOULD HAPPEN, HE WONDERED, IF AFTER JUNE 30 THE IRAQI GOVERNING COUNCIL PASSED LEGISLATION INIMICAL TO RELIGIOUS LIBERTY OR OTHER KEY VATICAN AND USG CONCERNS?

[1](#)3. (U) COPPOLA WAS APPRECIATIVE OF THE USAID REPORT ON EVIDENCE OF MASS GRAVES IN IRAQ THAT WE PASSED TO HIM, AND EXPRESSED SIMILAR APPRECIATION FOR RECENT BACKGROUND ON IRAQI RECONSTRUCTION AND HUMANITARIAN RELIEF THAT WE SHARED.

[1](#)4. (U) MINIMIZE CONSIDERED.

HARDT

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